

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SAJ-01 OMB-01

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8817

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

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AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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TAGSP INT, FR

SUBJECT: CANTONAL ELECTIONS -- SECOND ROUND

REF: (A) PARIS 5779. (B) PARIS 6968

SUMMARY. MARCH 14 SECOND ROUND CANTONAL VOTE LARGELY CONFIRMS MARCH 7 FIRST ROUND OUTCOME. LEFT PICKED UP APPROXIMATELY 50 CANTONAL SEATS AND APPEARS LIKELY TO GAIN CONTROL OF SOME 10 TO 12 ADDITIONAL DEPARTMENT-LEVEL GENERAL COUNCILS. SOME MAJORITY SPOKESMEN ARE ADMITTING THAT GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO DOWNPLAY POLITICAL NATURE OF CANTONALS BACKFIRED. BUT THEY ARE PUBLICLY CONSOLING THEMSELVES WITH ASSERTION THAT CANTONALS HAVE PROVED NOTORIOUSLY INACCURATE HARBINGER OF LEGISLATIVE ELECTION RESULTS. END SUMMARY.

1. MORE OF THE SAME -- SECOND ROUND CANTONAL VOTING LARGELY REFLECTS TRENDS ALREADY SEEN DURING FIRST ROUND CONTESTS. IN POST-WAR RECORD 68 PERCENT TURNOUT, SOCIALISTS (PS) RACKED UP MAJOR GAINS WHILE COMMUNISTS (PCF) ESSENTIALLY MAINTAINED THEIR POSITIONS. WITHIN MAJORITY, INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PARTY DID WELL WHILE CENTRIST FORMATIONS HELD THEIR OWN AND THE GAULLISTS (UDR) FALTERED. OVERALL, THE LEFT WON APPROXIMATELY 905 (APPROXIMATELY 498 BY PS) OF THE SEATS IN METROPOLITAN FRANCE UP FOR RENEWAL, WHILE THE MAJORITY CAPTURED 870. INCREASED TURNOUT RESULTED IN PART FROM LAST-MINUTE MAJORITY EFFORTS AND APPEARED TO GIVE EDGE TO MAJORITY CANDIDATE IN SEVERAL TIGHT RACES. OPPOSITION GAINS WILL TRANSLATE INTO CONTROL OF SOME 12 ADDITIONAL GENERAL COUNCILS, WHEN THESE BODIES MEET MARCH 17. PRIOR TO CANTONALS, LEFT CONTROLLED APPROXIMATELY 30 OF 95 FRENCH METROPOLITAN DEPARTMENTS.

2. FEW HAPPY FACES -- JUDGING FROM PUBLIC COMMENTARY, THE ONLY PARTY WHICH SEEMED GENUINELY SATISFIED WITH OUTCOME WAS THE PS. THE PARTY CAMPAIGNED HARD (MITTERRAND ALONE VISITED 23 DEPARTMENTS) AND EMERGED HOLDING MORE THAN TWICE AS MANY SEATS AS ITS NEAREST MAJORITY COMPETITOR. THE PC, FOR ITS PART, APPEARED DISTURBED OVER THE SOCIALIST SHOWING, AND IN PARTICULAR OVER FACT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT IN A NUMBER OF CANTONS SOME SOCIALIST VOTERS FAILED TO SUPPORT COMMUNIST CANDIDATES IN SECOND ROUND CONTESTS (THUS HANDLING VICTORY TO MAJORITY).

3. MARCHAIS WARNS THE PS: PC SECRETARY GENERAL GEORGES MARCHAIS CONCENTRATED ON THIS PHENOMENON DURING MARCH 14 TELEVISION INTERVIEW AND SIGNED MARCH 15 HUMANITE EDITORIAL. GIST OF HIS MESSAGE WAS THAT PS WOULD HAVE

TO SHAPE UP IF THE UNION OF THE LEFT IS TO WIN IN 1978
LEGISLATIVE CONTESTS. PS FIRST SECRETARY MITTERRAND
AGREED THAT FAILURE OF SOCIALIST VOTERS TO SUPPORT
COMMUNISTS REMAINED A PROBLEM BUT SAID THAT IT WAS
IMPOSSIBLE TO WIPE OUT "50 YEARS OF HISTORY" OVERNIGHT.

4. AND A WARNING FOR THE MAJORITY: MAJORITY IS ADMIT-
TING THAT RESULTS CONSTITUTE A "WARNING". SOME FIGURES
SUCH AS GAULLIST OLIVIER GUICHARD AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE
LECANUET ARE NOW SAYING THAT MAJORITY MADE A MISTAKE IN
TRYING TO IGNORE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE CANTONALS AND
IN NOT PUTTING UP CANDIDATES IN ALL CANTONS. AT THE
SAME TIME, THEY ARE NOTING THAT STRONG OPPOSITION SHOW-
ING IN CANTONALS IS NOTHING NEW. (SINCE 1958, OPPOSITION
HAS CONSISTENTLY WON MAJORITY OF POPULAR VOTE IN CANTO-
NAL ELECTIONS). IN ADDITION, THEY ARE NOTING THAT CAN-

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TONAL OUTCOMES HAVE RARELY PRESAGED LEGISLATIVE RESULTS.

5. CONCLUSION: MERITS OF GOVERNMENT RATIONALIZATIONS NOTWITHSTANDING, THE MAJORITY HAS CLEARLY SUFFERED A SET-BACK. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIFTH REPUBLIC HISTORY, THE OPPOSITION HAS MANAGED TO TAKE A MAJORITY OF CANTONAL SEATS UP FOR RENEWAL. WHILE THE IR DID FAIRLY WELL, THE OTHER MAIN PILLAR OF MAJORITY STRENGTH, THE UDR, EMERGED SIGNIFICANTLY WEAKENED. ON THE LEFT, HOWEVER, BOTH MARCHAIS AND MITTERRAND WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO WARN THEIR SUPPORTERS AGAINST "TRIUMPHALISM". THEIR CAUTION PROBABLY STEMS FROM PROBLEMS IN ASSURING SOCIALIST SUPPORT FOR COMMUNIST CANDIDATES, BUT IT ALSO MAY DERIVE FROM KNOWLEDGE THAT GISCARD AND SOME MAJOR MAJORITY FIGURES DID NOT CAMPAIGN. THUS IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW LEFT WILL FARE IN NO-HOLDS-BARRED MUNICIPAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS.

6. RESULTS ALSO INDICATE THAT BOTH COALITIONS HAVE MUCH TO DO IN PUTTING THEIR RESPECTIVE HOUSES IN ORDER FOR COMING CAMPAIGN SEASON. OUTLOOK IS FOR STRAIN WITHIN MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION AS BOTH SIDES GRAPPLE WITH IMPACT OF CANTONAL RESULTS. IN THE MAJORITY THIS COULD MEAN INCREASED DEFENSIVENESS AND SUSPICION ON PART OF UDR VIS-A-VIS A STRENGTHENED IR PARTNER. ON THE LEFT, THE PC WILL PROBABLY STEP UP ITS ATTACKS AGAINST THE SOCIALISTS IN AN ATTEMPT TO REASSERT ITSELF AGAINST A PS WHICH MITTERRAND IS NOW TERMING THE "PREEMINENT" PARTY OF FRANCE. THE SUCCESS WITH WHICH THE TWO

COALITIONS HANDLE THESE STRAINS WILL GO A LONG WAY TO-
WARD INFLUENCING MUNICIPAL, AND EVENTUALLY LEGISLATIVE
OUTCOMES.
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